

# Emergency Shelter Q & A

**Q.** What is an Emergency Shelter?

**A.** During the emergency phase, these facilities may be used to provide evacuees physical protection from the effects of a (natural or man-made) disaster.

**Q.** How many Emergency Shelters does the City of Norfolk have?

**A.** Currently there are 26 official shelters in our shelter system. Seven are approved Hurricane shelters and the other 19 are all-hazard shelters.

**Q.** What is the difference between a Hurricane approved shelter and an all-hazard shelter?

**A.** In order to have facilities approved for Hurricane evacuation shelters, they must meet national American Red Cross and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) guidelines. The key is the facilities elevation. Facilities located within a category 4 tidal inundation flood zone cannot be used unless they have received a special exemption. Nearly 90% of Norfolk is in the category 4-inundation flood zone. Only one facility (Lake Taylor Middle School) is located outside the flood zone and meets these national guidelines. Six additional facilities (Lake Taylor High, Norview High, Norview Middle, Granby High, Booker T. Washington High, Blair Middle) have received special exemptions and can be used for Hurricane evacuation shelters.

**Q.** What is an all-hazard shelter?

**A.** All-hazard could be a wide variety of events (e.g., flooding, tornado/wind storm, ice/snow storm, fire, hazmat, power outage, accident, nuclear, terrorism, war, etc.). During the post-disaster period these facilities may be used on a long-term basis to feed, care for, and provide temporary housing for disaster victims whose homes have been severely damaged, destroyed, or cannot return to their homes due to debris on roads and bridges etc.

**Q.** Isn't emergency sheltering an American Red Cross (ARC) responsibility?

**A.** By state law each locality has three options for emergency shelter. 1. The locality may choose to operate shelters without any ARC involvement. 2. The locality may choose to make shelters an ARC only responsibility. 3. The locality may choose to have a combined operation between the jurisdiction and the American Red Cross. Norfolk has opted for a combined American Red Cross / City of Norfolk shelter system.

**Q.** In the past when shelters have been opened in Norfolk, I have heard via the media that the Red Cross has opened shelters when the only people I see working are city employees. Why don't they give correct information that Norfolk has opened shelters?

**A.** Norfolk's system is a City/Red Cross Program and Norfolk employees who are working in our shelters will receive training via Red Cross guidelines. Norfolk has opted to operate our shelters via Red Cross guidelines. In order to receive funding from the American Red Cross they are considered Red Cross shelters and city employees working in the shelter are considered Red Cross/city workers.

**Q.** How are Norfolk's emergency shelters staffed?

**A.** Norfolk's workforce is divided into Alpha / Beta designations. Beta employees have been divided into three categories (Beta – shelters, Beta-non-shelter assignments, & Beta Exempt). Norfolk has an agreement in place with the ARC that states Norfolk will provide 1,600 Red Cross trained employees for shelter staffing. Currently there are only 887 Beta employees, which leaves a deficit of approximately 700 employees. Management is exploring ways to increase the available number of Beta employees back to approximately 1,600.

**Q.** How did I get designated as Beta and placed on these list?

**A.** The responsibility of an employees Alpha or Beta designation rest with each Department head. Every department within the city has both Alpha and Beta employees. Each department provides information to Human Resources of their departments employee designations. Human Resources is the custodian of the Alpha and Beta list. The information is updated by Human Resources and provided to Human Services for Beta shelter assignments.

**Q.** When I started to work for the city 10 years ago I was never told that I would be required to work in an emergency shelter. I don't think that it is fair, why can't I be removed from the shelter assignment list?

**A.** As city employees we have taken jobs accepting responsibility to deliver essential services to the public, even in times of disaster. As a currently designated Beta employee one of the duties is emergency shelter staffing. Alpha employees are assigned duties regardless of weather or emergency conditions and are subject to recall on a 24 hour 7 day per week status. Some Alpha employees also have shelter duties within their job assignments.

**Q.** I am a Beta and have other responsibilities during a disaster such as computer support or damage assessment responsibility. I cannot report for shelter duty because of these other city responsibilities.

**A.** Several employees have dual responsibilities such as damage assessment, computer support etc. However, ALL Beta employees have been given shelter assignments. Examples could be when the damage assessment or other assigned duties are completed those persons could still be used for shelter staffing. Some events may not product damage that would require the activation of the damage

assessment or computer support teams. In this case we would have the entire Beta workforce for shelter operations.

**Q.** What if I don't show up or refuse to work a shelter?

**A.** Shelter assignments are just like any other work duty, if you fail to perform your assigned duties you could receive disciplinary action or possible termination.

**Q.** I have three children and my elderly aunt living with me. Can I take them with me to the shelter?

**A.** You can take family members with you. However, you are reporting to the shelter to work, not to care for children or family members.

**Q.** What if I were to get hurt while working in the shelter?

**A.** You are considered on work assignment from the city and would be covered under the liability insurance for the City of Norfolk.

**Q.** Can I take my pets to the shelter?

**A.** By national guidelines, pets are not allowed in emergency shelters, unless the pet is a medical assist animal. Norfolk currently does not have a shelter that will allow pets.

**Q.** Is there any way I can be exempt from shelter duty even if I am a Beta employee?

**A.** If you have a special situation that you think should exempt you from shelter duty responsibilities, you need to provide your department head with documentation requesting the reason for exemption. The department will forward the request on to the City Manager for a determination. The request will be reviewed every six months.

**Q.** I have heard the term "Host Shelter". What does that mean?

**A.** Because Tidewater has a potential of major flooding and we are also a possible high target impact area for man-made events such as war or terrorism, the state Department of Emergency Management has developed an inland host sheltering system. Over 250 facilities have been identified in central and western Virginia and agreements are being developed with inland jurisdictions to provide host shelter sites for Norfolk evacuees.

**Q.** How would these inland host shelters be staffed?

**A.** The Virginia Department of Emergency Management is working out the logistics for host sheltering. It may be requested via VDEM that the effected jurisdiction assist in providing trained staff for host shelters. Norfolk may request volunteers from our Beta personnel or we may re-assign an entire shelter team to the host locality and facility.

**Q.** I have heard the term "Refuge of Last Resort". What does that mean?

**A.** Refuge of Last Resort are buildings and facilities that have been identified

throughout the City of Norfolk that may be used during a major event. These are buildings that do not pass FEMA or Red Cross guidelines in regards to flooding or possible damage from wind. However, because of the potential of traffic stoppages they may be used as a “Last Resort” to get evacuees into some type of structure. Refuge of Last Resort buildings do not have staffing assigned.

- Q.** The shelter I am assigned to has twenty people assigned per shift. Why do you need so many people per shift.
- A.** In doing the assignments, we have nearly doubled every shift because people may be out of town on business, vacation, pre-approved leave, or a variety of reasons that they cannot report. We are trying to allow for a possible shortage of staff. Also, if we were to get into a long-term shelter operation it allows for more flexibility in rotation of staff.